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Shifting Identities in a Globalising Metro Manila

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Shifting Identities in a Globalising Metro Manila

by

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requirements for the degree of

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"Shifting Identities in a Globalising Metro Manila"

ABSTRACT

This paper investigates the Philippine capital of Metro Manila, how it has been redeveloping as a “global city” over the past decade, and how the urban population has been negotiating the remarkable changes to their spatial, economic and sociocultural environment. The investigation assumes that a shift is occurring in the way that Filipinos identify with their country, moving from a national to a more international focus. Examined here are Metro Manila’s premier global city site, Bonifacio Global City (BGC), public symbols of a Filipino nationalism, and the significant impact of the Philippine business process outsourcing (BPO) industry within the country’s present economic context. The project references a research phase during the summer of 2012, including informant data and general observations of the city. The main arguments, however, shall be centred around discussions occurring in the present literature; results should be considered preliminary. Ultimately this limited study hopes to forward the discussion on the effect of globalisation on local populations, culturally and economically, and also contribute to discussions on postnationalism.

INTRODUCTION

Over the last decade, the Philippine economy has seen significant changes that impact the way the city is spatially represented, and how its urban population experience the new economic reality. In more recent times, new foreign direct investments have entered the country in support of the growing BPO (business process outsourcing) industry, which includes call centres, other

forms of back-office services, and the manufacture of consumer goods for export. The growing Philippine BPO industry has yielded two significant consequences for Metro Manila: first, the emergence of global city spaces, and second, new employment insecurities magnified by the prevalence of temporary contract work. The global city site examined here focuses on Bonifacio Global City (BGC), a former military base now being privately redeveloped to accommodate the increased flow of transnational capital presently entering the country. Within the growing BPO industry, this investigation focuses on the call centre industry and explores implications for overseas contract workers (OCWs).

My interest in Metro Manila's recent development began when I visited the city in 2007. Being of Filipino heritage, I thought it would be interesting to explore the city that my mother grew up in. For the first time I witnessed what a massive-scale urban redevelopment initiative looked like up close; this was my first encounter with the emerging BGC. At the time many of the lots were still vacant, although when I returned in the summer of 2012, the site's skyline had filled out dramatically, almost as if out of nowhere! New high-rises now characterised this global city space, occupied by hotels, apartments, condominiums, private schools, and of course, office spaces for multinational corporations. At this point, as in 2007, my anthropological imagination compelled me to wonder how the locals were experiencing, interpreting, or simply responding to the remarkable changes happening in and around their city.

In this paper I examine how the consequences of these recent developments might affect the way Filipinos identify with their city, and how the symbols of globalisation and the present economic climate might lead to shifting identities in a globalising Metro Manila. This project considers two aspects of globalisation and their sociocultural impact on the capital: first, the development of Fort Bonifacio as a unique global city space within Metro Manila, and second,

the growing predominance of the business processing outsourcing industry as a significant employer of urban Filipinos. This project also asks whether the present socio-economic climate might be changing a sense of belonging to the nation and how Filipinos relate to their central government, considering the privatisation of urban planning since the mid 1990s. This paper thus investigates how Filipino identity is shifting from a national to a more transnational representation considering the recent global city developments taking place in Metro Manila. The investigation focuses on two particular dimensions: first, the changes in the spatial environment, and second, shifts in the economic climate. In the former, I explore the contrasting symbolism of what appears to be the “old” or traditional face of Metro Manila versus the “new” international facade of the city, as exemplified through BGC. For the latter, I explore the impact of the burgeoning BPO industry as well as the persistent pressure to migrate overseas through working as an overseas contract worker. This research hopes to further inform new ways of thinking about national identity and how it is negotiated in the contemporary context of globalisation, possibly offering new perspectives on the effect of global economic and cultural forces on local populations. And lastly, the study hopes to contribute to discussions on postnationalism.

To examine these phenomena this paper will be divided into two parts. The first part will expand on broader themes, theoretical concepts and their related scholarship, while the second part will focus on my own observations of the city, as well as ethnographic understandings acquired through informant interviews—informants whom shall remain anonymous. My method relies heavily on semi-structured and open-ended interviews; this technique allows me to better understand situational contexts and the accompanying phenomena, as well as allow for the greatest possibility for unanticipated findings. While these open-ended interviews inform the

bulk of my data, formally structured interviews were also pursued. Due to the inherent limits of my data, which was acquired through a small convenience sample of informants over a short four-week period, the arguments I am making here are rooted mostly in the literature and should be considered tentative. In support of the discoveries made through this investigation, my evidence triangulates between phenomena as they are discussed in the literature, the informant responses that I had acquired over the four-week period, and my own observations of Metro Manila's spatial and sociocultural environment. In order to contextualise the cultural shifts occurring within Metro Manila, some key factors on the present Philippine economy must first be considered.

PART ONE: SHIFTING IDENTITIES

The Philippine Economy

As stated earlier, the recent economic developments are due to increases in foreign direct investment in support of the BPO industries. Like many countries in South East Asia, these developments have encouraged the Philippine government to move away from central planning initiatives and form public/private partnerships that encourage further foreign investment (Hogan et al 2012). The government initiatives of interest to this paper specifically relate to the privatisation of urban planning and the flexibilisation of labour, and this section explores how these factors operate within contemporary Metro Manila (Michel 2010; Shatkin 2009; Shatkin 2008; Shatkin 2007). First, the BPO industry has significantly impacted the local labour market; at the lower end of the skill level there are manufacturing jobs and factories that are typically located within export processing zones around the metropolitan fringe. The more specialised jobs,

on the other hand, such as call centres or other back-office services, are located within the metropolitan area, typically within the newly developed global city sites. Both groups of labour, regardless of skill level, support the BPO industry by producing goods and services meant for export consumption. With regard to the call centres and their noteworthy growth in Philippine capital, the investment community has begun to recognise Metro Manila as the “call centre capital of the world” (Francisco 2012). With over 800 active call centres, the Philippines is estimated to have surpassed India. The growth in the Philippine call centre industry can be attributed to a few factors. First, recent university graduates who regularly fill these positions speak fairly fluent English relative to the labour available in other Southeast or East Asian countries. Second, this labour pool is not only highly educated, but they also do not command the same wage requirements as their counterparts in more developed countries. And third, office space is still relatively cheap compared to other large cities across Asia, such as Hong Kong, Shanghai and Singapore. Considering these basic elements, it is no wonder that businesses from abroad have a growing interest in the cost-cutting opportunities available in Metro Manila.

The growth of the BPO industries require further development and improvement in basic infrastructure, but most especially in real estate, because the Makati Central Business District (CBD), the traditional centre of Philippine industry of the last few decades, can no longer accommodate the spatial demands of the recent influx of foreign investment. Despite the competition from newer global city development sites around Metro Manila, Makati¹ still accommodates many of the country’s corporate headquarters, including the regional offices of many multinational corporations and the Philippine Stock Exchange. Thus, Makati’s reputation as the nation’s centre of economic and financial power remains undisputed. Outside of Makati

¹ While the Makati CBD occupies only a fraction of the entire city of Makati, most people refer to the central business district simply as “Makati.”

new industrial development districts such as Rockwell Centre, Eastwood Cyber City and Manhattan Garden also compete for foreign clientele. In this investigation however I focus on BGC (formerly Fort Andres Bonifacio), one of the largest urban mega projects in Metro Manila. Interestingly, Bonifacio is situated right beside Makati; therefore, as the BGC continues to develop, both sites appear to be a single contiguous business district—developing the image of a “new Makati,” so to speak. As a development project, BGC has been described as being “solely directed at upper-middle and upper classes, young urban professional, and the relatively small groups of expatriates” (Michel 2010:395). In the 1990s, local developer Ayala Land Inc., a subsidiary of the country’s oldest and largest conglomerate, seized the opportunity to transform the site that was previously a military compound for the Philippine army and navy. Inspired by Makati’s cosmopolitan character, BGC takes the extra step in its development by specifically attempting to attract foreign investment into the country; Jose Antonio, one of the pioneer real estate developers of BGC, openly expresses his aim to “[transform] the city into a global destination”². While Makati symbolises the country’s industrial growth following World War II, Bonifacio symbolises how the city would like to further position itself within the world’s economy into the future. Combined, they both represent sites of economic development, industry and financial power within Metro Manila.

In light of the present developments, the current President boldly declared the Philippines to now be “open for business under new management”³ in his 2012 State of the Nation address, his declaration carrying a sense of confidence to match the nation’s greater than six per cent growth in its GDP⁴. His administration’s effort to “clean up corruption” has also been well

² Forbes Asia article: *Developer Jose Antonio Brings Glitz and Glamour to Real Estate in Manila* (Shmavonian 2012).

³ YouTube Video [7:38], President Benigno S. Aquino III, 2012 State of the Nation address (ABS-CBN News 2012).

⁴ Republic of the Philippines, NSCB: <http://www.nscb.gov.ph/sna/2012/4th2012/2012qpr4.asp>

received by the international investment community and continues to be a central feature of his administration. Despite the political rhetoric coming from the central government, the underlying motivation for these developments, as it has been noted, can be connected to the increased liberalisation and privatisation of the economy and urban planning initiatives (Michel 2010:389-392; Shatkin 2008).

Cultural Phenomena

Considering the shift in the government's urban planning focus, as well as the increasing flexibilisation of local labour, I argue here that a cultural shift is occurring in how Filipinos experience life in their rapidly globalising city and how they identify with the changes. Thus, the city's present transformation as global city destination and how its residents are utilised within the global economy are also redefining how Filipinos identify with their country. The concept of identity I explore here follows a postmodern assumption, in that it is fluid, multiple and often contradictory⁵; how it is "formed through one's membership of a *national* culture—and how the process of dislocating change, encapsulated by the concept of 'globalization,' are affecting it" (Hall 1992:280). Filipinos not only identify in terms of their particular regional ethnicities within the Philippines, or the religion(s) they follow, but they also define themselves in terms of the unified modern nation state, a national unity which seemingly contradicts with the multiplicity of regional ethnicities within its national boundaries. Thus, the concept of Filipino I analyse in this shift is contextualised within the modern concept of the nation-state.

Nationalism, or a national identity, in the Philippines follows Benedict Anderson's (1983) idea of an imagined political community where "members of even the smallest nation will

⁵ In reference to "The post-modern subject" (Hall 1992:277).

never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion” (1983:6). On the origins of national consciousness, Anderson introduces his core idea of print capitalism and how it perpetuates national consciousness, or a horizontal sense of camaraderie binding a nation’s citizens to one another. Generally, print capitalism refers to the industrial process of distributing written material to the country’s public, and rather than publish in various regional ethnic dialects, a national vernacular language of power emerges, creating a sense of fixity to the country’s common language of communication. In the case of the Philippines, Tagalog has taken that position of creating a unified field of exchange through, for example, the wide distribution of *Noli Me Tangere*—a fictional, quasi-historical depiction of colonial oppression in the Philippines. Although as transnational cultural influences begin to take further root, the perpetual use of English appears to displace some portion of a Filipino national character. Further eroding this sense of national identity is the decreased influence of print distribution itself—that is, how an enclosed national field of communication has been replaced by communication via the Internet, a medium that exceeds national geographic boundaries. Thus, Anderson’s imagined community model analysed here simply frames how Philippine national identity is understood within previous periods, but falls short in explaining how Filipinos continue to negotiate a collective identity in light of transnational cultural pressures in the present. Since the emergence of *Imagined Communities* (1983), other scholars have also explored nationalism in the Philippines and its impact on Filipino identity (Hogan 2006; Milgram 2005; Eder 2004; Pertierra 1999; Labrador 1999; Anderson 1994; Zialcita 1990; Pertierra 1989); my investigation here hopes to build on this continuing discussion.

To return to the idea of shifting identities, the present exploration focuses on the impact of global city development and the growing BPO industries. While the importance of an ethnographic research approach on the impact of spatial change and labour flexibilisation has been noted within urban studies discussions (Shatkin 2009:405), this paper hopes to further understand the impact of globalisation on identities and how they are negotiated within cultures of hybridity. Along with the importance of language I also argue how symbolic public spaces contribute to a shift away from national consciousness. On spatial symbolisms, it has been noted how not much has been said about “the implications of this change for national identity and political action” and how “it is increasingly the centres of business and commerce that communicate power and wealth in Metro Manila, while public spaces communicate ambivalence about past government efforts to shape the symbolic meaning of urban space” (Shatkin 2006:594). As the government-supported redevelopment of urban spaces in Metro Manila increasingly prioritises the for-profit private sector (such as BGC) at the expense of public spaces (such as national parks and monuments), many which symbolise and encourage a national unity, my assumption here is that the central government’s apathetic treatment toward these public symbols may further erode a nationalistic attachment in how Filipinos identify with their country, replacing it instead with a more global outlook as the urban cultural environment continues to emphasise global symbols of power and wealth. While these ‘shifting spaces of power’ and their implication to governance and politics in the Philippines have interested scholars (Michel 2010; Porio 2009; Shatkin 2006), this project instead focuses on the implications of these spatial changes on Filipino identity, and how it contributes to a shift away from national consciousness.

In the present context of globalisation, the cultural shift I am exploring is generally framed within the idea of cultural hybridisation through the process of transnational cultural

flows (Linnekin 2004; Appadurai 1997; Hall 1992). I explore how this hybridisation operates through the emergence of global city spaces, the linguistic duality in the Philippine popular media, and how local Filipino labourers are being integrated within the present global economy. In that context I analyse how Manilans exist within “cultures of hybridity [where] they must learn to inhabit at least two identities, to speak two cultural languages, [and] to translate and negotiate between them” (Hall 1992:310-314). This is not necessarily a novel exercise; many Filipinos have had to negotiate between ethnic, religious, and nationalist affiliations throughout their lives, including the various ways these multiple identities may or may not conflict with one another. What is new in this equation is how the nationalistic attachment appears to be in decline, favouring a more transnational consciousness considering the changes going on in the Philippine economy—a phenomenon I explore in greater detail in the second part of this paper.

In support of this shift, I also consider how diasporic Filipinos contribute to these transnational cultural flows, for example, through the emergence of “diasporic public spheres” (Appadurai 1997). The influence of the diaspora on local culture in the Philippines is notable in how they are continually engaged with the country’s social, political, and cultural affairs despite having relocated abroad (Rafael 1997). Diasporic public spheres are supported through mass mediation—traditionally in the realm of print—via web-based communication and other forms of electronic media. These new conversations between people at home and abroad contribute to a growing number of diasporic public spheres allowing for the emergence of a “postnational political order” because they naturally exceed national boundaries (Appadurai 1997:21-23). These diasporic public spheres allow Philippine migrants, whether temporary (OCWs) or permanent (*balikbayan*), to retain an attachment to their country of origin on the one hand, while simultaneously navigating between foreign and Filipino cultural sensibilities on the other. These

negotiations between the local and the global, I argue, contribute to a shift toward a more transnational consciousness between Filipinos at home and abroad, further dislocating an identity based on an imagined nationalist community.

In this project I also examine how ethnic or nationalist identities are perpetuated in a world that is increasingly dominated by a single global political economy; that is, how do these identities persist within a context of increased transnational cultural flows and cultural hybridisation? As others have argued, it is helpful to begin by approaching the idea of globalisation not simply as a force seeking to homogenize distinctive cultures around the world, but rather as a force that “[encourages] people around the world to *conceptualize* culture and identity in similar ways” (Linnekin 2004:240-241, emphasis mine; Hall 1992). It appears as though ethnic or nationalist representations of identities are increasingly presented as ‘images of identity’ in order to perpetuate and preserve cultural distinctiveness; or in other words, “a fascination with *difference* and the marketing of ethnicity and ‘otherness’” (Hall 1992:304). Here I am interested in how Filipino nationalist identity is being represented globally; where it has been heavily commoditised through consumer goods portraying stereotypical symbols of ‘the nation,’ such as the Philippine flag, which can be purchased at any tourist shop within the Philippines or from anywhere else online. These images portraying a Filipino national identity are what represent Filipinos around the world while at the same time providing a rallying point for Filipinos to reaffirm a national unity whether at home or abroad. These images of Filipino national identity, however, operate ‘within the logic of globalisation’ (i.e., transnational cultural and economic exchanges) further displacing a traditional notion of Filipino nationalism that had been rooted in particular histories and places; in other words, what appears to be a Filipino national identity is actually what I argue to now be a *transnational* representation of Filipino

identity. Furthermore, I assume that Filipino identity in the present generally persists through the collective self-identification of selected cultural images, as opposed to an effort to construct a national consciousness from a centre of state power, and it is this fluidity in identification that allows for a coexistence of multiple identities within hybridised cultural environments.

Defining Filipinos

It is difficult to understand the process of shifting identities without first defining the meaning and cultural characteristics of Filipino identity. In this investigation of identity, I emphasize the role of the immediate urban environment, the present economic conditions and how they influence the national (or local) and transnational representations of Filipino identity. Second, the characteristics of Filipino culture being emphasized here are framed within Benedict Anderson's concept of a national consciousness, that is, how language and history influence the present Filipino character. The Philippines is rich with ethnic and linguistic diversity, and includes a metropolitan area like Manila, which is divided along lines of class and wealth. Therefore, it is difficult to define a unified Filipino cultural character that is inclusive, comprehensive and applicable to the entire nation. Focusing on Metro Manila, this analysis considers residents of the city who primarily identify as being Filipino in terms of claiming, in varying degrees, some ancestral heritage to the Philippines. While the present social, cultural and political character of the city contains foreign influences, largely through the transnational investor class of migrants doing business in the Philippines, the concept of Filipino identity and culture I examine is based on the local experience. However, the influence of the minority foreign investor class on Filipino culture and the urban experience in Metro Manila cannot be ignored as the city redevelops into a global city.

What it means to be Filipino can also be contextualised within economic and cultural boundaries. As expressed within this section, that definition can also be loosely framed around a “native” ancestral heritage or through an “ethnic” *mestizo* identity stemming from the previous colonial periods. What defines being Filipino is more multifaceted than has been portrayed in the transnational context of *balikbayans* and OCWs. This matters with regard to shifting identities in Metro Manila because urban residents experience the present economic conditions differently depending on both ethnic background and access to wealth. The wealthy elites stand to benefit most from the growth in foreign direct investment through their greater establishment within Metro Manila’s business community, and are thus more likely to adopt global symbols of identity. Manilans living in poverty, on the other hand, will continue to remain culturally detached from the present developments, but not immune to the economic trends changing the city. The population of most interest here are the middle and upper-middle working class residents of Metro Manila who find themselves consistently engaged with global city development, and who largely define the character of the city; their responses to the way their capital is changing will best inform how the aforementioned shift is proceeding.

To return to identifying what it means to be Filipino in the present, language is a key aspect to be considered. Despite the place of Tagalog and English as lingua franca, the Philippines is a country rich with ethnolinguistic diversity. Of all the languages representing the Filipino character, Tagalog is the most widely used, with English coming in at a close second; Tagalog represents the dominant native language, and English represents both the influence of the American colonial period as well as the transnational language of trade. As it is spoken at present, Tagalog is an interesting object in itself and provides evidence of the Spanish and American cultural influence stemming from those two colonial periods; many Spanish and

English terms can be heard between any two Manilans conversing in Tagalog. The official governmental designation of the language is actually *Pilipino*; however, considering the language's ethnic origin, many Filipinos still commonly refer to it as Tagalog. While Tagalog and English are most commonly used throughout Metro Manila, other native languages of the Philippines strongly persist and are still commonly used within their native regions—e.g., compared with Tagalog, Ilocano is much more commonly spoken throughout Northern Luzon. Languages outside of Tagalog or English—such as Ilocano, Cebuano, Spanish, etc.—more or less represent another ethnic heritage for many Filipinos, whether that heritage is native to the Philippines or not. In sum, many Filipinos residing in Metro Manila are virtually trilingual to some degree, speaking Tagalog as the national language, with English representing a dominant international language of commerce, and a third language representing a given ethnic heritage. Within the urban context of Metro Manila, the trilingual nature of many Manilans highlights the limited influence of Tagalog and English in defining what it means to be Filipino.

There is another way in which Filipinos distinguish themselves from one another, and that is through family intermarriages that have occurred throughout previous generations; thus, Filipinos with a family history of foreign intermarriage are generally identified as being “Filipino mestizos.” Discussions of Filipino mestizos as they have existed historically refers to some Chinese or Spanish heritage, and can lead into investigations of class and wealth inequality in the Philippines (Chu 2002). While these mestizo groups identify with an additional ethnic heritage outside of the Philippines, Filipino mestizos are recognised to be Filipinos, at least on the level of nationalist affiliation, and self-identify as such regardless of their multiple ethnic family histories. Historically, these mestizo communities date back to the 16th-century Spanish colonial period when Chinese migration (Cantonese and Fujianese) to the city increased due to trade with the

Spanish settlers. In that period, intermarriage between the Chinese and native Filipinos became common. While the Spanish community remained mostly endogamous, some Spaniards also intermarried with Chinese mestizos and native Filipinos, although to a lesser extent. Regardless of Chinese or Spanish heritage, the rise of the mestizo class within Metro Manila would further concentrate access to wealth over time, resulting in an oligarchy of elites who continue to influence the direction of the central government to the present. The two most prominent groups are the Ayalas, a family of Spanish mestizo descent responsible for redevelopment efforts such as BGC, and the Sys, a family of Chinese mestizo descent who own and operate the country's SM brand of chain mega malls. This legacy of wealth and access within the mestizo class is still evident in the present-day urban landscape both in terms of what groups inhabit which parts of the city, as well as general levels of income and types of employment. In the present, class differences between mestizo and non-mestizo Filipinos can *generally* be summarised as the former having a more white-collar, middle to upper-middle class lifestyle with the latter having a more blue-collar, lower-middle class or impoverished standard of living. Consequently, considering the differences in wealth and cultural capital attached to either group, they seldom intermarry. But more importantly, the differences between mestizo and non-mestizo Filipinos illustrates how inequality is expressed within Philippine society further complicating what it means to be Filipino.

Aside from the mestizo class, there is another group of Filipinos influencing the cultural and economic landscape of the Philippines, and these are the OCWs and *balikbayans* comprising the Philippine diaspora. Despite the temporary nature of their contracts, OCWs can similarly be classed as a permanent diasporic population because they tend to remain perpetually overseas on multiple back-to-back contracts. *Balikbayan*, meanwhile, is a Tagalog word that translates to “to

return home” (*balik* is ‘to return’ while *bayan* means ‘home,’ or in this case the ‘home nation’) and are a population in reference to Filipinos who are originally from the Philippines but have officially migrated abroad permanently yet still proudly identify as being Filipino regardless of legal residence. As further defined by Vicente Rafael, “[their] relationship to the Philippines is construed in terms of one’s sentimental attachments to one’s hometown and extended family rather than one’s loyalty to the nation state [...] it means that one lives somewhere else and that one’s appearance in the Philippines is temporary and intermittent, as if one were a tourist” (Rafael 1997:270). Furthermore, in comparison to Filipinos within their home nation, *Balikbayans* do not necessarily discriminate with each other along lines of class or regional ethnicities while abroad. Having been brought up in a diasporic Filipino community, I observed how Philippine inter-ethnic distinctions appeared to be almost a non-issue.

While these migrant groups of OCWs and *balikbayans* are largely representative of the Philippine middle class—upper and lower, rural and urban—they identify with each other as a diaspora through the common thread of a sentimental attachment to their place of birth and the family they left behind. In support of the Philippines’s remittances industry, many *balikbayans* have actually began as OCWs, usually for labour-intensive employment such as working as care workers; in other cases, they have also migrated on professional or highly skilled work visas to fill engineering or information technology shortages expediting their effort to acquire permanent residencies. The prevalence of Filipino overseas contract workers in the last three to four decades has established an image of Filipino identity that is seemingly nationalistic and certainly dependent on foreign employment, but more importantly, the diaspora has encouraged the perpetual cycle of sending remittances back to the country as well as reinforcing the perceived luxury of being able to reside in the West, as opposed to the experiences of their compatriots

back home. When defining what it means to be Filipino within a transnational context, the influence of the diaspora plays a significant role in how they support cultural exchanges between the local and the global, a dynamic that I explore in the later section on ‘transnational Filipinos’; but first, I examine how nationalism is imagined in the Philippines.

Philippine National Identity

Philippine nationalist sentiment in the post-colonial context can primarily be conceptualised within the concept of armed struggle against foreign colonial settlers. A key artefact that reinforces this idea is a fictional novel titled *Noli Me Tangere*, written in the late 19th century by Jose Rizal, an upper class Chinese mestizo. Along with his co-conspirator Andres Bonifacio, the two figures are national heroes of the Philippines for their key roles in the Katipunan Revolution, which attempted to gain Philippine independence from Spain. Following his execution on 30 December 1896 at Luneta Park, Rizal became a symbol for Philippine nationalism, and his memory is honoured every year on that day as a national holiday known as Rizal Day. On the other hand, Bonifacio, an individual also symbolic of Philippine nationalism, would be memorialised through Fort Andres Bonifacio military installation, a site later re-developed into Bonifacio Global City. The Philippine national consciousness certainly makes the effort to remember its heroes through monumental symbols.

Noli Me Tangere—or *Noli* for short—has been deployed within the educational curriculum to remind Filipinos of their “founding father” and the struggle against colonial oppression. As noted by other scholars, the accompanying story of Rizal’s execution would surely appeal to the country’s Catholic sensibilities drawing parallels to the Passion of the Christ, where “Catholicism and the Catholic Church are vital sources of Filipino national identity”

(Hogan 2006:124; Rafael 1997:275). Considering how many Filipinos strongly identify with the Catholic Church, this coincidence in the two stories allows for a more comfortable coexistence between Filipino religious and nationalist identities. More importantly, *Noli* helped enable a national consciousness in some of the ways that Benedict Anderson outlined in his idea of print capitalism (Anderson 1983:37-65). *Noli* was widely distributed across the Philippines throughout the educational system in both Tagalog and English, creating a unified field of exchange within the country that further solidified Tagalog and English as official languages despite the rich diversity of languages and dialects. Through print form, Tagalog and English eventually became the Philippines's languages of power, and in the case of the former, dominate over Cebuano, Ilocano, Hiligaynon and Waray-Waray—the next top native languages of the Philippines⁶. Additionally, through the establishment of Tagalog as one of its national languages, *Noli* also enabled an “image of antiquity so central to the idea of a nation” (Anderson 1983:44), further establishing a sense of the Philippines's inalienable right to national sovereignty. In this sense, *Noli* is what “fixed” Tagalog as a unifying vernacular language of the Philippine nation creating a language of power that remains the same over time. To this day, *Noli* is still a government-mandated text of study throughout the Philippine education system for both public and private institutions, and its symbolic prominence resonates throughout Manila as symbols representing Philippine history continue to permeate the cityscape.

Meanwhile, as foreign economic interests continue to rise in influence—not only in terms of cultural influence through global symbols of wealth or prestige, but also through the privatisation of government functions such as Metro Manila's urban planning initiatives—it is still uncertain how a shift from a national to transnational consciousness will take place over

⁶ Philippine Census, 2010. Table 11. Household Population by Ethnicity, Sex, and Region: 2010.

time. With these points in mind, I explore how Filipino identities are shaped within a transnational context.

Transnational Filipinos

This section focuses on the cultural impact of the present global phase and how it is shaping a more transnational Filipino identity. Since the end of the Spanish-American war in 1898, the capital city of the Philippines has undergone significant changes. Politically, the country shifted from Spanish to American colonial administration, eventually claiming full sovereignty in 1946. As Gavin Shatkin argues, Metro Manila's identity corresponds with three general phases of capital-building strategies, which are "the (American) colonial, the modernist, and the global" (Shatkin 2006). First, throughout the American colonial period, administrators sought to "redevelop the city in the image of American cities in an effort to instil in its subjects a belief in the benevolence of colonial rule" (Shatkin 2006:581). Then, in the modernist phase which took place between the Philippines's independence in the mid-20th century all the way through to the end of Marcos administration in the mid 1980s, the newly independent state "sought to legitimize its rule and redefine national identity through the use of modernist planning and architecture" (Shatkin 2006:581). The period of the Marcos administration provided an interesting turning point in that Marcos's administrators emphasized a nationalistic identity for the country, but also endeavoured to "put the Philippines on the global stage...for the staging for international events that focused Filipino national identity for local and international consumption" (Hogan 2006:127-127). An example of this is in the Cultural Center of the Philippines (CCP Complex), a Modernist structure that features architectural styles that are indigenous to the Philippines. While the modernist phase recognised the value of international

recognition, it did not re-negotiate Filipino identity; rather, the urban planners of that period emphasized a nationalist Filipino identity. Finally, the global phase, a period which takes place from the end of the Marcos administration to the present, is a period which increasingly has incorporated the privatisation of urban planning, the growth of the OCW remittances industry, and the development of Metro Manila's global city spaces. It is within this three-phase historical context that Metro Manila's identity evolved from a colonial representation, to an independent (or nationalistic) representation, and then into a more global representation as the country integrates further into the global economy.

Transnational representations of Filipino identity tie directly into the global exchange of culture and capital, and shifts in how Filipinos identify with their country and the global political economy can possibly be attributed to *two* factors. On the one hand, transnational cultural transmissions (or two-way translations) between the Filipino diaspora and their compatriots back home reinforce a culture of hybridity within the country. And secondly, the growth of the call centre industry and other back-office services within Metro Manila significantly encourage urban Filipinos to negotiate between local and foreign cultural sensibilities almost simultaneously between work and home. In both cases, a culture of hybridity that includes local and global sensibilities is being reinforced within the Filipino population; however they differ slightly in how they arrive at this hybridity. With regard to Filipinos based overseas, whether on contract work (OCWs) or permanently, *balikbayans* not only support their countrymen back home through the remittance economy, but they also return with a kind of cultural capital, or "foreign *habitus*," which influences social norms back in the Philippines. In the Philippines, "OCWs are recognized as 'national heroes,'" and their cultural impact across their original home communities cannot be ignored (Rafael 1997:273-276). While abroad, *balikbayans* further

contribute to these transnational cultural exchanges within the existence of diasporic public spheres, a transnational field of discourse enabled through the global infrastructure of web-based communications.

The second factor operates on the local level and refers to the Philippine BPO industry, where foreign companies employ (relatively cheap) local human resources either to manufacture goods or perform a variety of back-office service functions for international clients remotely from within Metro Manila. Considering the different types of employment supporting each industry, the local BPO industry may not necessarily compete with the need for OCWs. Specifically, OCWs are typically employed as care workers within the health care industry in foreign countries, while the Philippine BPO industry employs technical staff for a variety of business services or employs labour for the manufacture of goods for export. Within the BPO manufacturing sector, considering the repetitive and isolated nature of the assembly line, being fluent in English is probably not required. Within the services sector however, fluency in the English language—including the awareness of Anglophone cultural sensibilities—is highly encouraged, if not necessary in order to retain employment. Although Anglophone cultural awareness may not necessarily be “officially” codified within corporate documentation, the value of “customer awareness” is encouraged by employers and can be considered to be a form of employment discrimination similar to gender discrimination. What this refers to in actuality is pressure for this segment of the labour force to continue communicating in English outside of the work environment in order to remain competitive, as well as pressure to regularly consume cultural material (such as films, music, etc.) imported from other countries—which, in the example of the Philippines, are exporter Anglophone countries such as the United States, Australia, Canada, and the United Kingdom. Not surprisingly, these are many of the same

countries whose corporations are presently investing into the Philippine BPO industry. In the eyes of foreign investors who set up call centres in Metro Manila, they look favourably on local labourers who best identify with their foreign worldview and with whom they could identify with most culturally. This level of influence, however minute, can be a deciding factor for a Filipino contract worker seeking employment renewal.

This cosmopolitan existence, which contributes to a cultural hybridity, is not new to urban Filipinos: these transnational exchanges have been occurring at least since Metro Manila's modernist phase, when the country was beginning to integrate more into the global economy. As Stuart Hall notes, "cultures of hybridity are one of the distinctly novel types of identity produced in the era of late modernity, and there are more and more examples of them to be discovered" (Hall 1992:310). The present context of Metro Manila surely exhibits novel examples of this phenomenon. Furthermore, if history is any indication, the resilience of ethnic affiliations may continue to stand the test of time. Filipinos throughout history have found a way to navigate multiple identities and will probably continue to do so despite the growing influence of the burgeoning BPO industry. However, nationalist representations of Filipino identity as an imagined construct may not sustain the same resilience against the increasing pressures of global city development if the central government continues to lose its influence over its capital city within the context of privatised urban planning. As Metro Manila redevelops into a position of greater transnational cultural and financial exchange, a shift in Filipino identity to a more transnational consciousness becomes more evident on both the level of spatial representation within the city itself and the level of changing behavioural norms within urban Filipinos due to the new employment context of the BPO industry. Having explored the economic (or

employment) dimension contributing to a more transnational representation of Filipino identity, I now turn to the spatial dimension of global city development.

The Global City

The most apparent and obvious aspect of the global city space is in actual physical representations: cityscapes that symbolically differentiate the old from the new. Architecturally, the glass and steel facades of the new buildings constructed at BGC are not unlike the skyscrapers found in more developed cities around the world: “principle investors and representatives of the Bases Conversion Development Authority (the government partner in the project) [were taken] on a tour of Paris, London and other cities [in order to incorporate] their reflections on the forms of these cities into the final plan” (Shatkin 2006:591-592). The fundamental contrast with the Marcos period here is that these new global city spaces are not anchored to a Philippine national (or cultural) identity, as in the earlier example of the Cultural Centre of the Philippines. The new spaces distinctly emphasize and represent a global (or transnational) worldview where “their impact is less to Westernize urban form than it is to commodify the urban experience” (Shatkin 2008:387-388).

The new urban planning initiative emphasizes commodity exchange within the transnational economic system as opposed to symbolising places of national pride or unity. As a premier example of the global city in Metro Manila, Bonifacio Global City symbolises a new development breaking away from the rest of the city, a sign of modernity and progress contrasted with the “undeveloped backwardness” that had earned the Philippines the reputation of being the “sick man of Asia.” However, the underlying political conditions that support this redevelopment have been around since the American colonial period as well as throughout the Marcos regime:

[The] privatization of planning and urban management; the middle-class-oriented anesthetization of urban spaces; the condemnation of state-led approaches in fighting poverty; and a focus on market-led strategies for providing affordable and low-cost housing, were already deployed in Manila long before neoliberalism became the global mantra of growth and development...[therefore] it would be misleading to conceive the current transformation of Metro Manila's urban landscape as something fundamentally new and alien to older forms modes of governance and capitalism in the Philippines. (Michel 2010:386)

The key aspect of the present initiative separating it from the past is the effort to specifically attract foreign direct investment. The present global city developments showcase to both the urban population and the rest of the world a new facade of a globalised Metro Manila that distances itself from a Filipino cultural or nationalist heritage—spaces that are more open to transnational exchanges of international finance and foreign cultural influences.

Fuelled by the growth of the business processing outsourcing industry, the global city tends to be inhabited by foreign expatriates and business managers finding residential spaces closer to their home aesthetic, and places which are closer to the central business districts that house the main offices of many multinational corporations. As evidenced through Bonifacio, the global city operates not only as a symbolic space of contemporary globalisation, or a residential space for foreign expatriates, but also contains an element of curiosity for urban Filipinos—that is, it has become “a place to see and be seen.” Urban Filipinos who are employed within the BPO services industry and who work within offices of multinational corporations at BGC (i.e., the Makati Central Business District) frequent these spaces out of necessity and habit. On the other hand, Manilans not necessarily employed at these spaces also visit out of curiosity. In sum,

global city development distinguishes itself in how it engages the urban population, and spatially expresses how the country as a whole is integrated into the global economic system. Rather than export goods and human capital to the rest of the world, the growth in the local BPO industry (with regard to back-office services) and the simultaneous emergence of the global city space showcase an importing of global cultural influence to a degree that has been absent in previous decades. It is these global influences, through imported capital and a growing foreign migrant population, that are changing Metro Manila's urban culture. And as urban planning moves from the public to the private in both spatial and economic terms, how urban Filipinos identify with their city and their place within it may shift along with the socioeconomic tide.

In this first part I have examined the present Philippine economic context and identified cultural trends that may possibly contribute to a shift in the way Filipinos identify with their country. I then further analysed a rough outline of the Filipino cultural character emphasizing linguistic and historical dimensions that influence how Filipinos identify in the present. Finally, I frame that Filipino identity within a nationalist context and analyse, along with the influence of global city development, how transnational forces might be displacing that nationalist attachment. Considering the analysis in this first part, I would like to offer a tentative point on Filipino identity. Due to a variety of factors, Filipino *cultural* identity is multifaceted, making it difficult to define and construct on a nationalist basis, while collective Filipino *national* identity, framed in terms of the imagined community model, appears to be largely reliant on specific nation-building strategies of previous Philippine governments. As foreign influences continue to dominate the urban landscape spatially, economically and culturally, a shift from away nationalist representation of Filipino identity appears to be occurring. My site observations on these points will be examined in further detail in the second part.

PART TWO: IN A GLOBALISING METRO MANILA

On Arrival

Toward the end of June 2012, I arrived at Manila's international airport following a twelve-hour plus flight from the United States. As the crowd made its way toward customs, nothing too unexpected or remarkable occurred, except for the sight of one particular image that immediately caught my attention. Standing there in line I could not help but stare at a poster advertising the new Trump Tower high-rise building currently being constructed in the central business district (CBD) of downtown Makati. Despite the title, the property is actually being developed by a local real estate firm (Century Properties Group, Inc.) but marketed under the Donald Trump brand of real estate. According to Century's web advertisement, Trump Tower will symbolise where "New York meets New Makati."⁷ According to the project director, they "strive to create a stratospheric impact in [the] city skyline" and "ultimately aim to achieve [their] much-anticipated objective of elevating the Philippines into a premiere and globally-renowned destination."⁸ While I had previously been aware of the developments currently taking place in the capital, I was still surprised at the level of ambition portrayed in that poster, and likewise in their web advertisements. Up until this moment, I had never imagined placing the Philippine capital alongside another classic global city such as New York City—and this experience gave me an idea of what might be waiting for me as I explored this re-developing city.

Upon further reflection, additional insight can be taken from my encounter with this poster. First, it highlights the fact that there are other significant local developers outside of the

⁷ Century Properties Manila: <http://www.trumptowerphilippines.com/location.html>.

⁸ Century Properties Manila: <http://www.trumptowerphilippines.com/developer.html>

Ayalas (the country's largest conglomerate) competing in the pool of foreign investment coming into the country. And second, it re-establishes Makati's continued prominence as a premier site of Philippine industry despite the newly developing BGC coming up right beside it. The old city of power refuses to lay stagnant and even goes by the nickname of *MoMo* (at least in development circles), meaning "modern Makati," and signifies how this new imagination of the global city has been received by the local development community. These points emphasize how global city development is not an isolated phenomenon restricted to my primary site (i.e., BGC) in this investigation, or how it is restricted to "special" areas of the metro area, but that it is slowly encompassing the entire city through new real estate, transportation and infrastructure projects. On arrival, that poster attempts to display to foreign visitors how the city of Metro Manila itself has arrived.

The City

Manila's metropolitan region is subdivided into seventeen local government units, and inhabited by approximately twelve million people.⁹ Of the seventeen municipalities, one of them is the City of Manila itself, which is home to the Philippines's official national capital and houses many of its federal capital buildings.

⁹ Philippines National Statistics Office, 2012 estimate. www.census.gov.ph



Political Map of Metro Manila. Source: Wikipedia.

Due to the limits of my accommodation and my short time of stay, I was not able to fully explore the entire region, and therefore my experience here is confined to the middle third of this map—i.e., the City of Manila, the lower half of Quezon City, San Juan, Mandaluyong, Makati, Pasig, Pateros, and the northern part of Taguig. Bonifacio Global City is in the northern part of Taguig bordering Makati, which is where the Central Business District is located. With respect to my hosts, the people that I had worked with, and the Institutional Review Board on file, I will not be disclosing the exact location of my stay since confidentiality was a key stipulation in the interviews I conducted.

When describing the character of the city, a few words immediately come to mind: bustling, lively, energetic and frantic. Simply put, there are people everywhere and in much

higher densities compared to many cities in Europe or America. The weather here is typical of this part of the world—generally hot and humid—and during my visit the country was approaching the end of its dry season. The wet season begins sometime around July, which is important to note for anyone residing in the city or planning a visit, due to the frequency of typhoons and monsoon rains that dump huge amounts of water over the country during this wet season. Because many parts of the city still lack an effective storm drainage system, the possibility of and dangers associated with flooding cannot be taken lightly. My stay took place between the final week of June and the final week of July.

Because of the density, Metro Manila has a fairly unique transportation infrastructure; a diversity of transportation modes ranging from light rail to pedi-cab tricycles attempt to tackle the city's infamous traffic conditions. Metro Manila contains one special mode of transport, however, which is not found elsewhere, and that is the *jeepney*. Built from what remained of surplus American Army jeeps following World War II, Filipinos refashioned the parts they found and put them to use as a means of public transport that not only endures to this day, but has also become symbolic of Filipino ingenuity and a source of national pride. In practice, the jeepney has served as an integral piece of the overall transportation infrastructure that many urban Filipinos rely upon, but at the same time, through its extensive carbon emissions, also contributes to the smog layer that blankets the capital.



A scene typical of Metro Manila's urban traffic (left), and a jeepney. Source: P. Belin photo archive.

Much of the city's density can be attributed to rural-urban migration, as people from various parts of the country have moved to the city hoping for better employment opportunities. Many of these migrants do not bring sufficient financial resources, leaving them little choice but to occupy an informal settlement. The city's many informal settlements have been a significant symbol of Metro Manila's image to the world since at least the end of World War II. It is this image of the city that the global city re-development phase is endeavouring to remove. While the image of informal settlements represent a city that is broken, run-down and backward, due to the failure of previous governments to accommodate its people, the shining example of the global city exemplifies the promise of a better future that is modern, hi-tech and progressive. These two spatial types characterise extreme ends of Metro Manila's present urban landscape and could not be further from each other, not only in their physical architecture, but also in what they represent culturally and economically.

While the informal settlements house many of the urban poor, many of them also provide accommodation for the lower-middle working class who *do* have access to basic education, are employed in a variety of services throughout the city (e.g., shop clerks, public transport drivers, etc.) and make up a large part of the urban population. Due to the pressures of development

many of these informal settlements are being forcibly pushed out of existence either through government mandates (e.g., the development of public rail lines) or, to put it anecdotally, private (not necessarily foreign) developers hiring “local guns” to remove the structures through arson. The latter situation is discussed openly among Manilans and is not necessarily a controversial topic. Regardless, this is the sort of “economic violence” that the residents of these informal settlements have to negotiate with.

The majority of the urban middle class population (the lower, middle, and upper-middle classes) occupy the rest of the city not unlike any other city around the world. Their settlement types are not particularly noteworthy except perhaps for some properties that have remained in some families for multiple generations and exhibit architectural styles that had been fashionable in the Spanish colonial period—properties that are slowly disappearing due to neglect or disrepair.



Informal settlement (left), and Bonifacio Global City's High Street. Source: P. Belin photo archive.

INTERNSHIP

Conditions of My Stay

While I did not have the chance to live in an historic property my hosts were greatly accommodating to my needs, and despite having to share a room with another guest from out of town, I was never made to feel as though I were intruding on their personal affairs. The following case studies include five individuals. First is Frank, my roommate throughout most of my stay who accompanied us throughout our exploration of the city. Frank is a *balikbayan* originally from Metro Manila, but currently resides in the United States and has for over two decades. Frank visits Manila fairly frequently; he gave me abundant feedback on how the city has changed from his childhood, offered me guidance in local customs and provided his (quite helpful) Tagalog language ability. Being of Filipino heritage but not coming from the Philippines itself, my Tagalog speaking ability still requires practice.

My next two informants are the married couple who hosted me, Jacob and Liz; they also have two young children who will not be directly addressed here. Jacob has held various temporary positions in the past, some in relation to his architectural training, but currently does contract work in a few of the call centres within the city. He is educated at the university level, speaks English relatively fluently (albeit with a distinctly Filipino accent), and was crucial in driving us around the capital. His wife is also highly educated, a graduate of one of the better-reputed private universities, and had until recently served as a primary school administrator for many years. At the time of my stay, she was pursuing a licence to be a caregiver in order to work abroad on a contractual basis, with the hope of possibly pursuing longer-term employment in Canada. Jacob and Liz's household can be considered a typical example of the urban middle-class: they don't have access to significant amounts of wealth other than their residential property, but despite some issues with employment, they get by fairly comfortably in their city.

A key condition of my visit was that I would also work as a teaching intern at a private Christian school, a position that was made available to me through a personal contact. While at the school I was accountable to two people, Victor and Marie, both also highly educated. Victor, who is the head administrator and part owner of the school, has a background in computer engineering and possesses an ambition to grow the business above and beyond his competition. As a business and property owner, I would classify his family household in the upper middle class group. Marie, on the other hand, is one of the school's top instructors. I assisted her with research for her curriculum, and taught some basic concepts in anthropology to her students. The five individuals outlined here provided the bulk of my informant data and have afforded me crucial feedback relating to my research questions, whether through formal or semi-structured interviews.

The School

The school where I interned provides primary and secondary levels of education. It is a fairly humble institution that endeavours to provide as much of what the municipality's middle class can reasonably afford, in spite of the fact that as a private school it certainly costs more than the available public schools. (However, the city where I worked contains other private schools as well, so there is an incentive to keep costs down.) Despite the private tuition, Victor, as well as my other colleagues, assured me that the student body of the school includes pupils from all levels of the middle class. While it might be predicted that the students from the lower end would have more trouble making tuition payments, Victor informs me that in his experience there is little correlation to the different student backgrounds he encounters, and that they all struggle similarly. The struggle to pay tuition at the school is a persistent problem despite their

best efforts to accommodate students; despite the higher costs of a private institution, many parents are compelled to take on the additional burden due to the inadequacies of the public school system. My colleagues explained to me how the public schools must teach around the clock, even all the way to midnight in some schools simply because there is too much demand for places. Public classrooms are over-crowded and learning materials are consistently in scarce supply; understandably, these conditions severely undermine the learning process. To make matters worse, the public schools still require a small form of tuition payment from parents to cover costs, which can vary from school to school, and often for a variety of reasons that are not entirely clear. This is the overall context of the educational system, at least from an administrative perspective. However, despite the inadequacies of the public school system and the additional costs of a private education, formal education in general is still highly valued among urban Filipinos.

Considering the difficulties experienced throughout the Philippine educational system, I questioned just how well the central government's nation-building agenda was actually incorporated into the curriculum. In one of my interviews with Marie, I inquired about the teaching of Philippine history. Considering that the school is a private institution, I was curious whether or not the subject was required. "Yes, it's part of the curriculum," she replied. Not quite sure where I was going with the topic, she appeared to be unsure how to elaborate, although my other colleagues at the school would later confirm to me that the teaching of Philippine history is a government mandate for both public and private schools. Continuing with Marie's interview, I switched to the issue of *Noli Me Tangere*: "When you were going to school, did you have to study *Noli Me Tangere*?" I asked. She claimed it was required when she was in high school; rather than elaborate on her experience as a former pupil, she preferred to focus on her present

situation as an instructor. She explained how the text is generally presented as an example of Filipino literature and not so much an historical account. She goes on to de-emphasize the value of the text and Philippine history within their school's curriculum; she states that "we have culture and civics subject; I'm not sure if every year they change the focus. Like here in high school, third year civics and culture is per civilisation, so it's not focused on—really focused on the Philippines only, and Philippine history, its world history and world civilisation." Despite the de-emphasis of *Noli* within the curriculum, she later admits that the text is heavily engaged in other ways. Throughout the school system—including the school where we worked—re-enactment of the story through costumed dramatic performance is a yearly ritual at both the primary and secondary level. Pupils commonly take field trips to sites relating to Jose Rizal, which include his former residence and the monument where he was executed. Neither his memory nor the tale of colonial oppression are being neglected in the popular culture—at the very least it is perpetuated on the level of ritual.

A SENSE OF PLACE

Life in the Middle

In addition to the city's traffic conditions and high population density, there are a few other curious features of Metro Manila's socio-cultural environment worth noting, particularly the prevalence of shopping malls and the nature of the city's news media. Beginning with the former, one cannot travel far within the metro area without stumbling upon another mega mall; just about every major district in the city can be identified through the character of its local shopping mall, which the immediate residents visit on a regular basis. These sites are what I observe to be Manila's "main street," not unlike what might be observed in many parts of the United States. In contrast to what I have observed of the U.S., these mega malls, along with their

foreign chain stores, *do not appear to* have replaced independent retailers, many of which populate the main streets and smaller shopping districts throughout the urban area. These air-conditioned mega malls are seemingly treated as theme parks, a place to *magpasyal* (Tagalog word for touring), or to take a leisurely stroll. While there, considering the foreign or global nature of the shopping environment and consumer goods on sale, urban Filipinos have a chance to keep up to date with global consumer sensibilities. While Manilans generally frequent these places, apparently they do so typically just to visit, take a quick stroll, and perhaps have a cup of coffee. This was also a common practice among my informants.

In terms of the popular media, there is also an interesting dualism at play with regard to how information is presented to the local residents. Turning on the television, there is no doubt that many of the shows and programming are intended for local consumption; all content from humour to language is presented in an unmistakable Filipino character—even the imported Argentinian and Spanish soap operas have been dubbed over into Tagalog. Curiously, the British and American content remains unedited; considering the widespread use of English in the Philippines, this is not entirely surprising. In contrast to the television presentation, which certainly appeals to Filipino cultural sensibilities, virtually all of the popular printed news material is presented in English. The *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, *Manila Bulletin*, *Manila Times*, and the *Philippine Star*—all popular sources in wide circulation—present their news content, editorial pages and advertisements in English. Despite all of their advertised claims to be widely read, I found that neither my informants, nor the people I had been working with at the school particularly cared to read any of the newspapers I purchased. I imagine that there is a market for English language news on the Philippines, and I suspect however that, analogous to the rest of the world, much of this same content is now being consumed online.

Regardless of consumption patterns, there are points that I take away from this observation. It is interesting how the popular press chooses to represent their city. Whether the content was intended for local or foreign consumption, the image of daily life in Metro Manila is presented in an English character as opposed to the Tagalog presentations on television. Thus what is happening in the city (politically, financially, etc.) is not only accessible to the city's largely English-literate middle class, but to a global audience as well, which is potentially encouraging to foreign investors. Through these popular news outlets, I observe what appears to be a perpetuation of an English sensibility that coexists within a Filipino cultural context. The way in which the two forms of media coexist in Metro Manila seem to portray a cultural hybridity between the national Filipino character and the global language of commerce. The level of transnational interconnectedness supported through Metro Manila's English language newsprint enables the city to remain linked within the Anglophone network of global cities around the world, while supporting a more transnational representation of Filipino identity on another level.

National Parks, Monuments and Museums

Returning to the spatial character of Metro Manila, there are a few public sites worth mentioning. The four sites include Intramuros, Luneta Park, the National Museum of the Philippines and the Cultural Center of the Philippines Complex (CCP). The first two sites are significant in terms of their historical meaning within Filipino national representations while the latter two are places for performance and exhibition. Three of the above sites are not far from each other and located within the City of Manila (a distinctly "federal" municipality), while the CCP Complex is located slightly south in the City of Pasay. Intramuros, also known as the old

walled city, is an artefact of the Spanish colonial period that dates back to the 16th century. Next door to Intramuros is Luneta Park. Also known as Rizal Park, Luneta Park was built in the early 19th century and holds a special significance: it is the site where Jose Rizal was executed in 1896, thus beginning the Philippine Revolution against the Spanish colonisers. The Park also houses the Rizal Monument, which is guarded by military soldiers all day, every day of the year. Not far from Luneta and Intramuros is the National Museum of the Philippines, a former a congressional building turned into a natural history museum and the site of the National Art Gallery. And finally, built in the 1960s during Ferdinand Marcos's presidency, the CCP Complex provides performance and exhibition venues for the arts, which include theatre space for large-scale productions.



Intramuros (left) and Rizal Monument. Source: P. Belin photo archive.



Front entrance of the National Museum of the Philippines (left) and Tanghalan Pambansa, the main venue of the CCP. Source: P. Belin photo archive.

The four sites are individually interesting in what they represent and how they present themselves to the public. For as long as they exist, Intramuros and the Rizal Monument will always recall the memory of Spanish colonisation. While the walled city is largely dormant on its own, and in many ways is an interesting site for architectural study, the Rizal Monument continues to signify armed struggle and the martyrdom of Philippine national hero Jose Rizal. Additionally, in the latter's case, the story of *Noli Me Tangere* makes the symbolism of the site all the more sacred, creating a dynamic between text and place that reinforces the idea of struggle while creating a nationalistic object that unites Filipino citizens. The Declaration of Philippine Independence of 1946, which called for an end to American rule, as well as the 1986 EDSA Revolution political rallies that deposed Ferdinand Marcos, took place at this site. It is interesting to note how the two sites are being managed despite their significance in Philippine history. With the exception of the Rizal Monument, both Intramuros and Luneta Park have fallen into slight disrepair. Compared to the Washington Mall in Washington, D.C., the "Manila Mall" has not been well kept by the government. I draw this comparison between the two cities because this particular part of the capital is specifically inspired by Washington, D.C. in its construction during the American colonial period (early 20th century). The American influence is visibly apparent in the architectural style of the National Museum. While the actual reasons behind the disrepair might be complicated, the image being portrayed to the public is that of unimportance, perhaps fuelling a public apathy toward those periods of Philippine history.

The National Museum and the CCP Complex have also fallen into slight disrepair, but considering that they are not exactly at the same level of national historical significance as the earlier sites, the symbolic implication to a national representation differs slightly. While not a popular museum by any measure, The National Museum represents an artefact of the American

colonial period and the central planning initiatives of that era. The CCP Complex, on the other hand, is an artefact of the Marcos period that was imagined through his effort to display central power to the rest of the world—not unlike other dictators of that period in other parts of the world. Like the National Museum, the architecture of the CCP Complex is indicative of its time, and as with the previous sites, the lack of attention given to them by the central government exudes an apathetic disposition toward their historical significance. If a message is being communicated to the public, it is that these artefacts of former eras no longer represent the new, modern and progressive character of the global city. What the four sites have in common—in contrast to the megamalls around the city, as well as the global city areas—is that they no longer hold a significant place in the urban landscape, and quite possibly, the mass consciousness of urban residents. From my observation, it appeared as if the public largely avoided these sites and simply went about their business around them, barely stopping for a look. By comparison, sites around the Washington, D.C. national mall had many more visibly interested tourists when I last visited. While the old nationalist symbols remain derelict and neglected by the government and the people, Mega malls and the re-developed sites around Metro Manila, meanwhile, are consistently buzzing with life. This had been made most clear to me as I later returned to visit BGC.

Bonifacio Global City Revisited

Situated right beside the heart of Philippine economic power that is Makati, Bonifacio Global City is Metro Manila's premier example of the new cityscape that seeks to capture the imagination of local urban residents as well as foreign visitors and business executives looking to do business in the capital. On our drive into the BGC, Frank would comment on how the city has

changed, how it continues to feel more like a new city and, in an excited way, how it is more like a “real” city, making comparisons to modern amenities and specific qualities (e.g., cleanliness) found in the West. The hidden irony is how this site takes its name from Andres Bonifacio, a national hero of the Philippines who fought for Philippine independence from Spanish colonial rule, yet does not explicitly exhibit symbols of Philippine nationalism, and is in fact inhabited mostly by foreign wealth. On the drive there, my resident companion and driver Jacob appeared mostly apathetic about the place, and probably would not have chosen to visit if not for my request to do so. At BGC, as in other tourist destinations around Metro Manila, a greater diversity of people from many parts of the world could be seen in contrast to the rest of the city that seemed to be predominantly comprised of local Manilans. The contrasting sense of places between the new global city and the rest of old Metro Manila are reflected in both of my companions: Frank, who is accustomed to being around a diversity of people and a Western standard of living, is quite comfortable and even excited when visiting the BGC, whereas Jacob, a local resident of the city, appeared slightly uncomfortable in the new environment. When observing the site more closely, there is a distinct lack of a Filipino presence at the BGC: no symbols of Filipino culture; no murals celebrating the country’s history; and, perhaps due to a shortage of local residents frequenting the site, no jeepneys rushing up and down the streets.



BGC's emerging skyline (left) and BGC's High Street. Source: P. Belin photo archive.

At this site we have a new representation of Metro Manila, but—in contrast to the public spaces explored earlier—without the long-time symbol of Philippine urban transport or other national or cultural symbols. Meanwhile in Makati, a site symbolising an earlier phase of Philippine industrial development, the place is much more respectful of Filipino cultural sensibilities and inclusive of Philippine historical and nationalist symbols. What the BGC and the earlier public sites have in common however is that they are both centrally planned; where the old had emerged from a public foundation, the new has been created through private wealth. What does this mean with regard to the question of Filipino identity, in either a nationalist or transnational sense? I argue that in the case of the former, the national consciousness was never established in a way that Filipinos could truly value and incorporate into their daily lives. In the case of the latter, the new transnational representations of a Filipino identity filtered through a redeveloping Metro Manila are equally contrived but more valuable within the global economic system. The shift in central planning strategies, along with a greater integration of Metro Manila into the global system of trade implies a shift in how Filipinos themselves negotiate and identify with the present economic context. Returning to the opening question: how might Manilans be coping with the present reality of their city?

MAKING A LIVING

Domestic Contract Workers

The time I spent with Jacob was immensely productive in terms of understanding how people navigate their lives in the city, not only through his honest and unsolicited feedback, but through the fact that he knew the streets like any other natives. He himself is from the City of Manila—the country's capital city and political epicentre, and more than others that I have met, he held an endearing sense of belonging to his country; he was quietly proud to be Filipino. I was

quite lucky that Jacob was unemployed for most of my stay because it allowed him plenty of time to take me around the city and bring me to places that might be of interest to my research. Prior to my arrival, Jacob had been employed in the call centre industry for at least a year; he had experience working within not one but several call centre stations around the city. When we first met, Jacob was anxiously waiting to hear back from one of his placement contacts for news of being re-hired for another six-month contract. In addition to his employment situation, we frequently discussed issues of politics and government, recent floodings that devastated the city, and how Filipinos generally go about their daily lives. As we toured the city together, I frequently inquired about the tiniest details that I observed happening around me, which greatly reinforced my sense of place and informs much of what I discuss in this paper. Throughout our conversations, the topics would eventually touch on the economic situation introduced at the beginning of this paper.

Of all the situations that Jacob described, one particular incident spoke volumes about the call centre “culture” taking place within Metro Manila. Granted, Jacob’s feedback was not unique: his stories coincided with colleagues he met throughout his call centre experiences. Many of the call centres operate with two levels of employees, and for this case I use an example based around the idea of selling insurance. The front-end sales employee first initiates the call to potential clients. Over the phone, they establish rapport, attempt to get the customer interested in the product and answer any and all questions or concerns that might prevent a sale. Because the sales process significantly relies on rapidly building rapport with customers who are based overseas in Anglophone countries, call centre employees, even at this level, are highly educated, converse at a relatively fluent level of English, and possess a fairly high level of cultural awareness of their customer base, not to mention an expert understanding of the product being

sold. The back-end sales personnel on the other hand are the “closers.” As the front line approaches an actual sale, the closers take over the call and actually close the transaction. A key point between the two is that the front-end sales staff do not close transactions and do not take commission from the sale; they simply do the “heavy lifting” of the sales process. While the closers have access to commission, the front-end teams are compensated exclusively through fixed contracts. Interestingly, the front-end contract workers are generally local labour while the closers and upper management are from overseas (from whichever country the company originated). Jacob said he had never worked with call centre management that had been locally recruited—which is not to say that it never happens, but this was his observation and experience.

One day when Jacob went into work, and the closer assigned to him called in sick. That day he encountered a difficult customer but continued to work the potential sale. The customer refused to speak with anyone else, not even a substitute closer, so Jacob remained on the line. Upper management had been observing the call the entire time and instructed Jacob to close the transaction. The customer had been complementary of Jacob’s ability to negotiate the deal smoothly and ultimately agreed to purchase the product. Considering all of the work and effort that Jacob put into the sale, he asked management whether he would be taking a direct commission from that sale. Their response was cold and non-negotiable: “Sorry, but under policy we cannot pay you more than your contract.” “But,” Jacob retorted, “you instructed me to continue the sale!” “Nope, sorry,” they replied, as they continued about their business. Needless to say, Jacob felt severely disillusioned over the experience. I later questioned whether he considered working abroad like so many Filipinos do; after all, his wife is now training to work overseas. “No,” Jacob responded. “Honestly I would prefer to stay here, but Liz is insisting that we move to Canada so I’m just going along with it for now.” Then I asked why, unlike Liz, he

didn't want to leave. His response: "Because this is my home. Why would I want to live anywhere else?"

Going Abroad

Liz is not so convinced that they can continue in the Philippines. Among other reasons, her primary motivation is to be able to provide better future opportunities for their two kids. As I had discovered earlier, the public educational system is woefully inadequate, while the private education system continues to become more difficult to afford for most middle class families, a problem that is partially attributable to the growing prevalence of temporary contract work. With especial attention to the challenges that workers like her husband face in the call centre industry, Liz offered her response to the situation: "*Ang hirrap nang tabaho ditto talaga*—Trying to make a living here is difficult, for sure." Throughout my recorded interview with Liz, I could tell when she was making a deeply emotional point because she switched from English to Tagalog. "For many parents," she continued, "their mentality is to take their children [out of] the country, because you will be stuck, you will be stuck in the system. And it's a degrading system, actually, and there is no progress. It's a regressing thing, a regressing cycle." "Like the rich are getting richer and the poor are getting poorer?" I ask. "Yes," Liz replied, "and it's getting worse."

On that theme, I inform her of the news I have been reading and seeing on television, including the recent increases in foreign investment, new record postings on the Philippine Stock Exchange, and the strengthening of the Philippine currency. News analysts continue to paint a rosy picture. Liz interjects—almost rolling her eyes at what I have been saying—and continues to declare, "It's getting worse actually. They are just looking at it from the point of view of the rich...they are just, uh,"—at this point she exchanges English for Tagalog, speaking animatedly:

They like to say, “Oh there are plenty of jobs!” Well yes, a lot of call centres...but mind you employees are kicked off before they reach the sixth month because, by six months, if you surpass six months you will be “regularised,” and most of the companies do not allow you to be regularised because by then you will be enjoying the benefits of the company.

Liz then explains to me how the situation is not isolated to the call centre industry, indicating that the local SM chain of mega malls across the country also encourages this practice: “The sales ladies there, before they reach the six-month mark, they require them to renew a six-month contract. Employees are not regularised anymore, so that the company will not give them benefits of thirteen-month pay, of SSS¹⁰—and that’s normal.” On this point, Gavin Shatkin reports on the “prevalence of ‘overstaying contractual workers’—workers who remain beyond six months without being regularized, [which is] a violation of Philippine labor code...[This] suggests a serious issue with the implementation of the code—[and] indeed, the Philippine government itself is the largest employer of overstaying contractual workers” (Shatkin 2009:387-388). To clarify, Liz is not going overseas simply for the sake of employment nor to support the remittances industry. Her plan is to save her Canadian income, and when the time comes, relocate the rest of her family and possibly start a business. Like many Filipinos, her primary goal is to escape what is increasingly a perpetual cycle of employment insecurity that increasingly dominates the country’s economy.

It is useful to consider where this issue of employment insecurity intersects with the question of identity. In Jacob’s case, his attachment to his national identity makes him reluctant to migrate. His wife, on the other hand, is apparently more willing to leave the country behind

¹⁰ SSS (Social Security System): Philippine central government pension plan.

and assume a more Canadian identity. I asked Liz whether she was interested in pursuing dual citizenship with Canada and the Philippines, and her response was yes. In private, however, Jacob admits to me that she would rather leave the country behind and begin all over again. Among my further observations with Jacob and Liz is a sense of detachment and resignation from their central government; neither seemed particularly interested in how the country was being run. While Jacob prefers to remain in the Philippines, his attachment to his country seems more sentimental than coming from a place of engaged citizenship, let alone jingoistic. In this sense his attachment is similar to how my *balikbayan* roommate would recall stories of his upbringing in Metro Manila, and if their stories are any indication of the popular sentiment, I suspect that the experience of negotiating one's identity within the present political and economic climate is conflicting, complicated and worthy of further investigation. Despite the apathy toward being an engaged Philippine citizen, there remains an element of resilience in terms of identifying with the Philippines as a nation; the sentimental attachment I have observed in my informants exceeds whatever imaginary attachment the central government (or the nation's elites) might impose upon the city's cultural or spatial dimensions.

A multiplicity of identities within Metro Manila's hybrid culture was expressed in how Liz and the rest of my informants tended to switch between English and Tagalog, with the former expressing a transnational identity and the latter expressing the vernacular Filipino identity. When speaking with me, the outsider, they began in English as if forgetting for a moment that I also understood Tagalog. However, when the topic of conversation became more personal, they began expressing themselves emotionally in Tagalog. It is as if their communication habit (*habitus*) is to simultaneously exist between both different cultures and ways of communicating. I suspect that these instances of code-switching also occur independent

of myself as I regularly noticed Filipinos around me switching between English and Tagalog, or between another dialect I did not understand. These instances showcase to me how a cultural hybridisation is the norm within this metropolitan environment, and the locals did not appear uneasy about it at all. While Metro Manila might have been cosmopolitan to some degree in the past, the present economic context—a labour context emphasizing a greater integration into the transnational economic system—might encourage a further shift that expresses a globalised identity to match the way the city is redeveloping. In a globalising Metro Manila, representations of Filipino identity—as expressed in spatial and cultural environments—may shift further away from a nationalist perspective and into a consciousness that is more compatible with transnational influences.

CONCLUSION

In this paper I have examined the intersection between contemporary globalisation in Metro Manila and the issue of Filipino identity—how Filipinos are navigating a shift from a national to a more transnational consciousness and representation of Filipino identity. To address the question of how this shift is occurring, I have inspected and analysed two areas relating to the symbolism attached to urban spaces, both public and private—old and new—as well as the overall economic climate. On the spatial dimension, I have shown how as urban planning initiatives and symbolic representations shift from public to private interests, there is evidence of a concurrent shift in how Filipinos identify with their city, moving from a national to transnational consciousness. This is exemplified through the apparent apathetic treatment of the nation's public spaces by the central government, along with a popular disinterest toward these same sites. On the other hand, the private spaces—e.g., global city development spaces and mega

malls—all receive meaningful support from the central government through public-private urban planning partnerships, and the regular visitation of these sites by Metro Manila's residents. With regard to the employment situation, a shift in consciousness can be attributed to the prevalence of call centre and back office services employment within the BPO industry. Pressures stemming from a contractual employment situation have created a climate of financial insecurity throughout the urban working class, thus enabling a culture of hybridity due to the pressure of remaining current within foreign cultural sensibilities while simultaneously existing within their local cultural environment. In some cases, as in the example of my informant Jacob, it behoves the urban working class to remain current within foreign cultural sensibilities in order to remain competitive within the call centre industry. Considering the growing prevalence of call centre contract employment, as well as other back office jobs catering to foreign clientele, it can be presumed that the present economic climate encourages a pronounced occurrence of a cultural hybridisation within Metro Manila.

In addition to the changed spatial and economic dimensions, two supporting cultural elements contribute to this shift in consciousness: the cultural influence of the diasporic *balikbayan* class of Filipinos—who, as some evidence suggests, support the shift now taking place—and the perpetual use of the English language within Metro Manila's popular press. Both contribute to the existence of diasporic public spheres, enabling a two-way communication between populations abroad and back in the Philippines. The resulting diasporic public sphere, acting as a virtual space for cultural hybridisation, may support a shift in consciousness within Metro Manila. A culture of hybridity is in effect on the level of real urban spaces, basic survival needs and the virtual cultural space enabled through web communications. This arrangement

further solidifies the Philippine capital's role as global city while encouraging its urban population to shift into a more transnational representation of Filipino identity.

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